

get admitted to veterans health care facilities? There are 50,000 veterans waiting in line as we speak for an appointment to a veterans health care facility. The President's budget for this year provided \$106 million, not much over last year which itself was inadequate to meet their needs. Over the next 5 years, this budget request is \$18 billion below what is needed for current services. We can do better than that.

We have got promises to keep to our veterans and these promises, above all, should be kept. Given the sporadic, unpredictable violence and the harsh, hard circumstances, it is not surprising that many of our troops come back, some have said as many as 17 percent, from places like Afghanistan and Iraq with difficult mental problems. This, too, is something we could do.

Mr. Speaker, we have to follow up the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) who not only is a member of the Committee on Armed Services but also formerly a military spouse and speaks knowledgeably about this subject.

THE HIGH PRICE OF GASOLINE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, as the summer driving season is set to begin, gasoline prices are at a record high. While some continue to blame the Bush administration and the Republicans in Congress, the truth is that neither is responsible for the record highs. The reason for the high gas prices includes the cost of crude oil due to a worldwide explosion in demand, the lack of refinery processing capacity, and the overregulation here in Washington.

The House will get the opportunity to address this problem this week with the House bringing to the floor the Energy Policy Act of 2005, H.R. 6. The long-awaited legislation contains a number of provisions that would lower gas prices. H.R. 6 encourages more domestic production of oil with incentives such as a streamlined permit process, promotes a greater refining capacity to bring more oil to market, and increases the gasoline supply by stopping the proliferation of expensive regional boutique fuels.

The Department of Energy predicts by 2025 U.S. oil and natural gas demand will rise by 46 percent, with energy demand increasing 1 percent for every 2 percent in GDP growth. Critics of H.R. 6 claim that it would do little to curb consumption or drive down prices. In fact, this legislation includes provisions to do just that. In order to scale back demand for oil, the proposal encourages vehicles powered by hydrogen fuel cells and increases funding for the Department of Transportation to work to improve fuel efficiency standards. Furthermore, it authorizes \$200 million for the clean cities program which will

provide grants to State and local governments to acquire alternative-fueled vehicles.

Curbing demand is necessary, but it is not nearly enough to lower the price of gas. We also need to increase domestic production of oil. Ending our dependence on foreign oil is not only important to the economy but also doubly important to national security. Currently, the U.S. imports about 60 percent of its oil. The Department of Energy projects this number will increase to 73 percent by 2025. In order to ensure reliable and secure supplies of oil, we have no choice but simply to increase our domestic supply.

Domestic energy production must be increased without compromising a clean environment. There have been giant leaps in technology that would produce oil and natural gas in an environmentally safe manner. We need a comprehensive energy policy that recognizes that sophisticated new technology greatly reduces adverse impacts on the environment by exploration and production. Along with the incredible advances in technology, transportation, and medicine that improve our lives comes the increased need for energy.

In addition, overregulation by the government also contributes to regional and seasonal price fluctuations that increase costs and, of course, reduce flexibility to meet consumer demand. According to the Energy Information Agency, last year refining costs represented about 20 percent of the retail cost of gasoline. By simply scaling back the excessive and cumbersome Federal regulations on refiners, we could significantly reduce these costs. For example, the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments mandate the sale of cleaner burning reformulated gasoline in order to reduce summer smog in nine major metropolitan areas. The law also requires that RFG contain at least 2 percent oxygen by weight.

To comply with these regulations, refiners must switch from winter grade fuel to costlier summer blend gasoline. According to the Federal Trade Commission, this adds 4 cents to 8 cents per gallon to the price of gasoline. Likewise, complying with a national low sulfur gasoline regulation for passenger cars not only represents scientific challenges for refiners but also could adversely affect gasoline supply and, of course, availability. The industry will need to invest more than \$8 billion over the next 3 years to meet this requirement, which will result in higher prices at the pump.

This hodgepodge of customized fuel requirements increases production costs which are ultimately reflected in the price of gasoline that we pay today. These varied gasoline specifications also restrict the ability of refiners and distributors to move supplies around the country in response to local and, of course, regional shortages.

High gas prices affect every sector of the American economy and especially

hit families the hardest. Congress has been debating and debating this issue for too long. We now have the chance to enact this week comprehensive energy legislation that will go a long way to lower the cost of gasoline. We need to fully embrace this opportunity before it is too late.

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. DAVIS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to join the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT). I have long admired and respected his efforts since I was elected to Congress and began serving with him on the Committee on Armed Services.

I want to take a moment now to specifically mention our military families. By now, every American should be familiar with the daily contributions and sacrifices made by our service members, but we have to remember that their families serve, too. Many spouses remind me all the time that when the military prepares for deployment, well, so do their families. As a former military spouse myself, I am incredibly grateful and humbled by their unique sacrifices. With so much of our attention on other things, their contributions often go unnoticed and underappreciated. I want our military families to know that we are working to improve the family-support infrastructure that exists for them. Access to family support services should be consistent without regard to where the families reside. Use of technology can certainly enhance their access to family support, but it sure cannot take the place of a support network.

Democrats are seeking more innovative ways to fund child care for military families, to provide a fully resourced, comprehensive and portable health care benefit, and to increase the value of the commissary and exchange benefit.

We have also made progress with addressing the demand for family housing. This has included privatization initiatives, military construction, and adequate funding for the basic allowance for housing. Democrats are also exploring ways in which we can work together with DOD to enhance educational and employment opportunities for military spouses.

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And I can tell the Members firsthand how difficult this is when faced with the challenges of the military lifestyle. By recognizing the contributions of our military families, we have identified a critical part of addressing future recruiting and retention needs of the military. We must continue to recognize their sacrifices as well as those

made by the service members themselves.

This is an important task, and I am hopeful that Congress will continue giving this the concerted attention it deserves as we prepare the Defense Authorization bill for next year.

OUR U.S. MILITARY SUCCESSES IN AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FORTENBERRY). Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the accomplishments that we have been able to achieve in Afghanistan, thanks to the dedicated and courageous service of our men and women in uniform. These Marines, sailors, airmen, and soldiers exemplify the best of what our country has to offer. By risking, and sometimes giving, their lives, they have allowed the 30 million people of Afghanistan to live in peace and prosperity, free from the fear and tyranny of the Taliban.

By liberating Afghanistan, our fighting men and women also ensured that al Qaeda would no longer be allowed to operate with impunity in what was then a failed state. In a brilliantly waged campaign, our Special Forces brought the fight to our enemies. By utilizing local resistance forces and at times even charging into battle on horseback, they liberated this beautiful country from a menacing dictatorship.

What the Afghans, with the help of the U.S. and our Coalition forces, were subsequently able to achieve is nothing less than a miracle. On October 9, 2004, barely less than 2 years since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan held the first democratic elections in its history, overwhelmingly electing Hamid Karzai as its President. Afghanistan is now scheduled to hold another election on September 18 to select its first parliament.

These two elections, coming less than a year apart, are even more impressive given that this country has been at war for the better part of the last 30 years. First, fighting a Soviet invasion, and later, a civil war between the different mujahideen.

I could not find better words than those of a reporter of the Associated Press to describe the presidential election in Afghanistan when he wrote: "After a generation of conflict, Afghans are slowly emerging from darkness. In the afterglow of last fall's presidential election, there is hope in Kabul."

In this country of 30 million people, more than 10 million registered to vote, 41 percent of them women, these elections were monitored by more than 5,400 independent observers from groups such as the EU, the OSCE, the U.S., and the U.N., giving further validity to these historic elections.

The hard work of our men and women in uniform does not stop there. They have worked closely with our allies to train a national Afghan army so that their people and their hard-fought democracy can be protected. Almost 19,000 soldiers now serve in the Afghan national army with another 3,400 being trained by our troops. These soldiers are being deployed to all corners of the country.

The United States has also trained more than 25,000 police officers, and other countries have assisted as well. Germany, for example, has trained nearly 6,000 border and national police. Our U.S. Armed Forces have also trained 120 judges, lawyers, and court personnel. Ensuring the rule of law that it would be protected in this nation that has known only war and tyranny is miraculous.

The U.S. military has also helped to rehabilitate more than 7,500 canals, underground irrigation tunnels, reservoirs, and dams to increase agricultural output in this arid country. These policies have resulted in an 82 percent increase in wheat production.

Our U.S. military forces were also able to assist in the demining and paving of the very important Kabul-Kandahar highway, ahead of schedule, as well as rehabilitating 74 bridges and tunnels.

These accomplishments have led to a 30 percent growth in the Afghan economy from 2002 to 2003 and an estimated 16 percent growth from 2003 to 2004. These policies have led to 2.4 million refugees returning to Afghanistan from neighboring countries after many years of being displaced by war. Another 600,000 internally displaced individuals have also been able to return home.

Mr. Speaker, I could stand before this body for hours to speak about our success in Afghanistan and the positive difference that our U.S. military troops have made in this country. I understand their sacrifices and those of their families. My own husband, retired Lieutenant Dexter Lehtinen, was a platoon leader in Vietnam until a grenade almost took his life. The scars on his face are constant reminders of the price so many Americans have paid for our freedom and the price that so many more continue to pay.

As my stepson, Aviator First Lieutenant Douglas Lehtinen, prepares to deploy Iraq, I cannot help but think about the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. While nothing can replace those who were lost and although the scars will never disappear, those acts of bravery have not been in vain.

May God bless our men and women in uniform and may God bless America.

CAFTA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, a bowling ball weighs about 170 times the weight of a slice of sandwich bread. It does not take a physicist to see the mismatch between a bowling ball and a slice of bread. It does not take a trade expert to see the economic mismatch between the United States and the nations that make up the Central American Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA: Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

The way that proponents of the Central American Free Trade Agreement talk, one would think that Central America was one of the biggest economies in the Western Hemisphere. CAFTA nations, in fact, are not only among the world's poorest countries, they are among its smallest economies.

Think about this: This big trade agreement that President Bush wants, CAFTA, the combined purchasing power of CAFTA nations is almost identical to the purchasing power of Columbus, Ohio.

Tomorrow the House will hold a hearing on CAFTA. Since President Bush took office, Congress has voted within 55 days of the President's affixing his signature on a trade agreement. April 28, coming up, will mark the 11-month anniversary of when the President signed CAFTA. In other words, trade agreements are always sent to Congress quickly. Within a couple of months, we vote on them.

The President has delayed CAFTA for 11 months because this simply is not an agreement that the American people want or need. As I said, other trade agreements were all done within about 2 months, but because CAFTA is so unpopular, because trade policy in this country is so wrong-headed, the President still has not asked this Congress to vote on CAFTA.

Clearly, there is dissension in the ranks for good reason. CAFTA is the dysfunctional cousin of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and continues a legacy of failed trade policy.

Look at NAFTA's record; NAFTA is the United States, Mexico, and Canada: One million U.S. manufacturing jobs lost to the North American Free Trade Agreement. Wages of Mexicans have stagnated. Environmental conditions, especially along the U.S.-Mexican border have worsened dramatically. And yet the U.S. continues to push for more of the same: more of the same job hemorrhaging, more of the same income-lowering trade agreements, more trade agreements that ship jobs overseas, more trade agreements that neglect environmental safety standards, more trade agreements that keep foreign workers in poverty, more trade agreements that undercut our food safety laws in our country. The only difference between CAFTA and NAFTA is the first letter.

The definition of insanity is repeating the same action over and over and over again and expecting a different result. On trade we hear the same promises over and over and over again, and